

Spring 5-31-2019

# Meta Me on an Ecstatic Walk with Hansel and Gretel: A Reflection of Dispensed, Reclaimed and Reframed Existence

Laura White

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## Recommended Citation

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Meta Me on an Ecstatic Walk with Hansel and Gretel:  
A Reflection of Dispensed, Reclaimed and Reframed Existence

by

Laura White

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SYNTHESIS  
MASTER OF ARTS  
CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING  
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

May 2019

Advisor: Bobby Ricketts

**Abstract:** This synthesis revolves around a rendition of Hansel and Gretel, in which I am exiled from innocence through the chaos of life. I recollect my breadcrumb clues in the form of thoughts and beliefs that I have held for as long as I remember. The breadcrumbs lead to open-ended questions about habits of mind for meaning making. My process of self-examination uses an adaptation of Action Research and I connect my current life to where I began using an Intersecting Processes analysis. I observe and document the unfolding of my life while studying it, using self-expression and thinking made visible with movement and Performance Art.\*

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\* The Synthesis can take a variety of forms, from a position paper to curriculum or professional development workshop to an original contribution in the creative arts or writing. The expectation is that students use their Synthesis to show how they have integrated knowledge, tools, experience, and support gained in the program so as to prepare themselves to be constructive, reflective agents of change in work, education, social movements, science, creative arts, or other endeavors.

I am literally in ecstasy, right now, as I write these words. "To be beside oneself," is the original Greek meaning, "the culmination of human possibility." We tend to imagine this state as rapturous pleasure, sometimes including epiphany, or full consciousness. The following examination pertains to observing how my thoughts, thinking style and manner in which I hold the thinking evolved over my lifetime, from my first memories at age two, through childhood, college years, early adulthood, up to now. In some cases, my thinking was in the form of belief, illusion, doubt, skepticism. I suppose I experienced a bit of spiritual rapture, not as intense as St. Theresa of Avila, who envisioned the angel Michael stabbing her heart with a glowing hot spear initiating her mystical awakening.

Henry Haskins (1875-1957) said, "Treat the other man's faith gently; it is all he has to believe with." These words reverberate through my mind and body because from what I've experienced, our beliefs are our *only* possession. Our beliefs influence how we perceive ourselves and our self-esteem, and infiltrate into our skeletal posture, muscle tension, organs, our posture and voice quality and our movement. Our beliefs give us reason to live and they add value to our efforts.

The words, *thoughts* and *thinking* in this paper sometimes stand in for the category 'thoughts and thinking,' like, belief, fear, intuition, wonder, awe, disillusionment, doubt, skepticism, day-dreams, and ideation. They might be contextually implied. Sometimes I'll use *thinking* as the noun of the action *to think*, as in, "*Thinking about thinking*," rather than, "*Thinking about thought*." In a few cases I'll work with belief about believing, or intuiting about intuition, but not name them as such. I'll generally use *thought* and *thinking* to avoid tangling in semantics and maintain continuity in my explanation of reflecting on the kind of activity going on in our minds.

I also want to deal with the way in which thoughts are *held*, which essentially measures the intensity of commitment to the thought. I've practiced "*holding an idea lightly*," which came from my Vipassana Buddhism practice of allowing an idea to feel true but not to the extent that I'm gripping onto it for security. This practice allows me and others to move from being constantly affected to responding to what arises, whether externally in the world or interiorly, or bodily.

### Why I Examine Myself Unfolding

Life has given me opportunities to hold my faith and thinking gently, though I haven't always done so. In hindsight I see that my experiences of Adverse Childhood Experiences, (ACE), pivotal moments of creative inspiration, intuitive insight, following a New Age self-empowerment cult, and years of healing from that misguided thinking wildly oscillated my orientation to life. Holding my thoughts lightly allowed me to propagate the next round of ideation in a constructive way. My research is to gain a perspective on intersecting pasts throughout my life. I affirm the infusion of sophisticated healthy mental habits into my way of being since studying in the Critical and Creative Thinking (CCT) program of the University of Massachusetts, Boston. Peter Taylor, the program director, defines critical thinking as the ability to hold ideas in tension with alternatives (pers.comm.) I intend to define and examine the close similarity between thought and belief, then share my reflections of how the beliefs shaped me, my path and my life.

### Intentions, Methods & Use of Metaphor

Using a vantage point of Action Research in Hindsight, which I adapted from Practical Action Research, allows me the flexibility to understand what beliefs and thinking affected my life trajectory to decide in what ways to proceed or change. With Action Research in Hindsight analysis, I discovered that my development as a person is one theme, my aspiration and mental efforts toward becoming a 'professional' Performance Artist, parallels my personal development. They are combined and also reflect one another, like a double helix. One theme influences the other. Most significantly, my intuition and somatic urge to communicate infuse each thought and action through my life. I will affirm the connection between mind, brain, and body through recollections of bodily and existential experiences. By finding ways to articulate the connections of bodily knowledge and Performance Art to an academic community, I plan to create a method of compassionate curiosity-based analysis of my thinking habits. Providing a theatrical backdrop using the fairy tale, Hansel and Gretel, is how I intend to lift away an explaining approach to reveal a prosaic proposition for the sake of my readers' interest. I wish to begin awareness of my new thinking practices and artistic practices, integration of productive new habits of mind, and preparation for perennial adjustments that increase my readiness for future steps.

I aspire to continue disrupting the paradigm that the brain holds hierarchy over the body with those whose vocation is a body-based discipline. An alternate concept of the body is that it's a sensory organ which receives information and knowledge just like the brain and the traditionally established sense gates. Some say the body receives information much sooner than our brains. Another obvious view proposes that the brain and the body are intrinsically the same because the brain has corporeal elements. Finally, I wish to cultivate my intuition, which some say is housed in the body, and may have informed more of my life than I previously noticed. All of these motivations will become the first step toward my life-long aspiration of being a Performance Artist, whether I attain that vision or not, or some other version of this type of artist.

### Critical Thinking Methods

The methods I've chosen provide a quantitative frame to support my non-verbal realities so that my readers will not be left behind in the metaphoric woods where we will walk. Action Research, a structured system of identifying the desired outcome and mediating with steps that verify progress, works as a projection into the present and future. A method I've made up called, Action Research in Hindsight, 'ARH', retraces from the base of my personhood through the intersecting paths I've taken to arrive "here." Arthur Foshay devised "Action Research in Imaginative Hindsight" for situations that lack data due to a logistical inability to gather it or find a reliable constant. His objective is to determine future steps if everything might have occurred in the realm of designated possibilities. Thus, Foshay includes "Imaginative" in his title. My use of imagination differs from his approach because I have data.

A meta-unfolding is happening as I put word to it. With ARH, my artwork from two decades ago vaguely fore-imagines (but does not predict) what I'm pursuing today, and I link each piece of art to a significant passage. The exhibits in this paper show a small sample of art that represents my life phases.

The "Evaluation Clock" focused my vision for this written reflection. Items for a rubric assessment developed out of anticipating how artists, dancers, therapists, community organizers, and existentialists, might use my information. A feeling of "resolution," and inklings of future actions will help me summarize the research. This basic checklist will help me know when I could draw

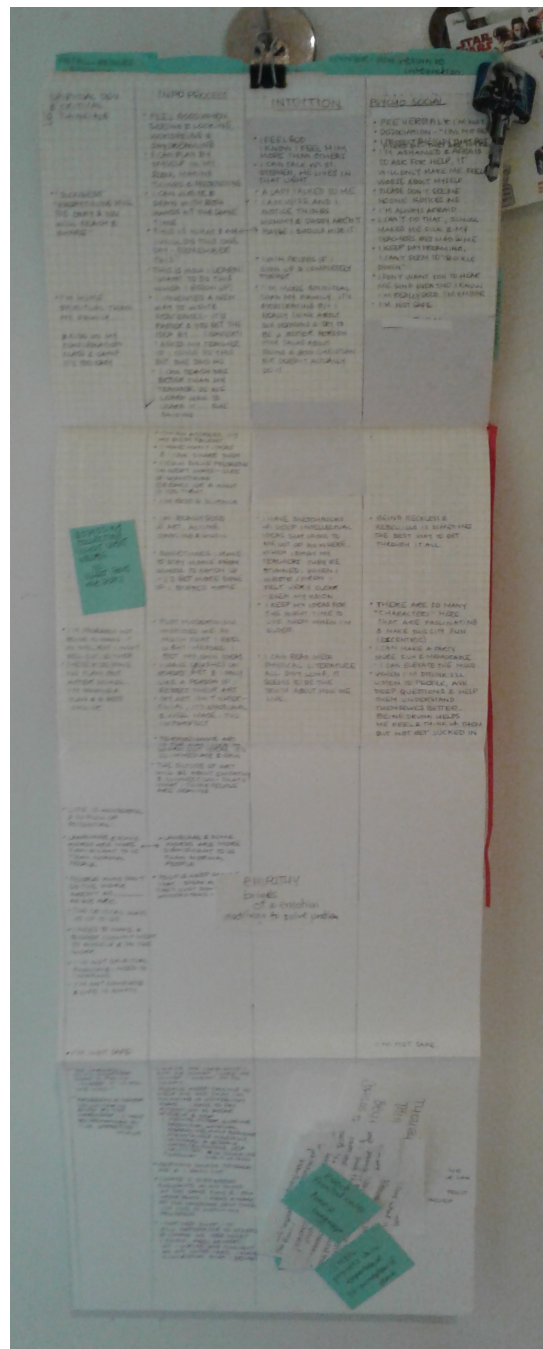


Diagram # 1. My handwritten Intersecting Process, Categories of Types of Thoughts, Events, and Evidence of Growth.

my query to a close. At first, I only thought to account for my thinking trajectory, and now my scope of vision is open to multiple layers, forming dimensions of behaviors that align with the thinking. My art supplements diagrams that examine my position for more detail.

With the Evaluation Clock, I saw purpose in an "Intersecting Processes" chart and embedded one in my ARH to reveal the dimensional evolution of my significant thoughts and beliefs and detect patterns and corollaries. Metacognitive Tools & Instruments, for instance, my Mind Map helped me detect how unconscious thinking, intuition and "Critical Feeling" guided my journey on paths leading out toward significant endeavors and then back to me. I've clarified terminology to efficiently carry out Socratic discernment of related concepts that I've held with skepticism. The anticipation of employing critical thinking in my future art studio practice, vocation, and participation in my community is the motivating force behind all of these reasons and methods. After all, what use is an examined life if I defer investing in my discoveries?

I suppose my intuition nagged me to seriously think about Hansel and Gretel, but initially it was just a random rumination. I read several versions and interpretations and its symbolic elements easily related to my life in three phases.

#### Me as Hansel & Gretel in Three Stages

The children's story, Hansel and Gretel, suits my autobiographical synthesis because their actions demonstrate resilience in danger and problem-solving in a way with which I resonate. I divide their journey into three major stages echoing my life stages. 'Dispensing of Existence,' illustrates when the children are exiled from home and innocence, beguiled by illusion and nearly killed. In the peak of danger, the children create a turning point for themselves, thereby reconnecting with their autonomy; this belongs in the 'Reclaiming of Existence' climax of the plot. 'Reframing of Existence,' the generalized scenes of the story, leads me to wonder how they recovered after escaping from The Witch. I lend parts of my own experience to fill in lapses of detail.

#### About My Art & Art Making

Much of my research data is experiential - intuitive in the form of stories, in words and my entire being. The thread of chronology has been pulled away, leaving Kairotic time in impressions and

fragments. Samples of my art illustrate my development and orientation in my “Lifeworld” (Scharmer, 2007). I didn't anticipate that my accumulation of doodles, drawings, carvings, paintings, and performances fit the analogy of Hansel and Gretel, or that certain themes preceded this inquiry decades ago. In the moments leading up to this writing, I've looked through the eyes of my younger self at different ages, tenderly and fondly holding those thoughts once again.

My journals and sketchbooks from high school to my current sketches contain images of expressionistic figures. Some seem to stop in mid-motion and occasionally show muscular engagement to register physical sympathy from viewers.

Some works define parts of the body as symbols or allegorical elements. My art juxtaposes the above ‘objects’ with critical feeling when words are not (yet) in my consciousness. I strive to capture fleeting physicality, either with specific techniques, or images of psychosomatic events. My viewers tell me they feel engulfed and somewhat transfixed while viewing my two-dimensional art. While making these images with graphite, oil paint, collage, embroidery, and ceramic relief, I about how they are a way to gather ideas to write, script, or choreograph future Performance Art pieces. I have yet to determine how that works, but the idea excites me.

Autobiographical art isn't necessarily meta-reflective. Mine is. I try to create art that documents its unfolding process and its synchronous effect on me while making it. The ultimate enticement to a work of art, I think, is to find the trace of feeling and thinking that took place as the artist's hand-made each mark.

As I mentioned, these distinctive marks allow the viewer to see the sequence of steps and decisions made by the artist. In my estimation, entry into the meta-process begins with seeing the sequence through evidence of movement. For a long time, I've struggled to articulate my reasons for transposing impressions of mental formations into two-dimensional marks that indicate fourth-dimensional movements. I'm impressed with my work and ready to display it when it tells me something that I didn't know about myself. Why would people want to see art about myself, such as a technically correct self-portrait? I'd rather invite them to watch me discover something about myself, something I care about, so they might take part in the experience, even passively





*Exhibit #1. Pencil drawing in response to 9/11, with The Twin Towers, approx 3x4", Made by the author, 2001.*

as a viewer. I want this to happen even if the artwork is completed, they can retrospectively participate empathetically.

Mitch Greene (2017) paraphrases Aristotle, "What is it we do when we do what we do?" The question prompts artists and performers and audiences to embody "Wide Awake-ness" (M. Greene, 1995) or presence over automaticity. This is one way that '*the performing arts*' differ from Performance Art. The former shows something aesthetically pleasing or arousing. The latter may not concern itself with pleasure or arousal unless it is deliberately stylized as such. The former tells something, and the latter asks open-ended questions which the audience may contemplate or leave if they feel the performance is complete without convoluting it with interpretations. A flower can be like a ballet performance and taken as an aesthetic object. A flower can represent the outcome of growth and blossoming and contemplated as such. Alternately, it can be experienced raw, with interpretations consciously restrained. I fumble to find the right words to describe what happens inside Performance Art, at least, the kind I like to see and enjoy making. One obstacle is that there are at least as many types



*Exhibit #2. As yet untitled embroidery of a human brain showing the synaptic connections with thread, as I reflect and contemplate on readings.*

of Performance Art as there are performers. Richard Schechner (2003) pointed out that a performance is any behavior that is "twice-behaved" or "restored." I want to attempt to dissect the term for the art form on my own. "Per" means, 'by means of' and "form" is, 'a particular way in which something exists or appears.' I assemble these phrases and get, "A performance (piece) is by its own means a particular way in which something appears or exists." However, later I learn that there are acts we perform zillions of times per day, and *Performance Art* -the twice behaved mundane performed act, the deliberate motion that restores a mundane thing to greater value or meaning. Could a person perform a Performance Piece by giving form to a stylized persona that represents an idea or object? By embodying its characteristics and giving form to process, is Performance Art a type of becoming? A person embodies the .... and objectively observes while simultaneously representing a subjective unfolding process....? The grammar makes a mess of its potential and stumbles over itself.

Can the English language substantiate this liminal realm? Fortunately, we have the word, "meta" to double back on whatever we engage. During most of my undergraduate years in art school, I

heard the word 'OF' in my mind's ear, while I rode my creative stride. I glided into the preposition that supports possession, connection, amounts, positions, results, relating to, causes, comparisons, distances, times and days. To me, OF is discrete like the definition of 'molecule,' "The smallest particle of a substance that still is the essence of that substance." OF hinges the thing and the way it is. It refers back to the title of this paper, Meta-Me..., and is synonymous with the forward and back motion in reflective-practice and Action-Research. 'OF' is The Observer in my meditation and also the artist's brushstroke as an extension of their arm. OF describes my art unfolding while my discovery and learning unfolds. To put this in very different words, 'geisha' literally means 'art' in Japanese. A geisha is *geisha*, and so is everything she does. A Geisha is a performance OF herself being herself.

### Myself as a Child at Home

The curriculum of teacher-performer, Naira Ciotti, starts with personal content invested in what she calls, "Auto Performance," where the student works with childhood memories to ascertain body memories and a reference point for future personas. Without having attended one of Ciotti's classes, I imagine that this exercise creates the student's inklings.

As the first child of David and Karen, two young and active parents, I often played on my own and entertained myself. I particularly loved daydreaming at home and in school and couldn't accept that my family never went out for rides on elephants. Many craft projects perennially cluttered my bedroom floor separated by towpaths to my bed, closet, and door. I dissembled toys to find out how they fit together, hid in secret places, believed I played the violin, yelled mean words at the kids down the hill behind my house for the sake of being mean and angry, and clicked the shutter on my camera without film. I was an early reader, wrote with both hands, and my favorite color was brown. I believed that my role in life was to be a Child, meaning that some people were Adults, and I would never be one. When my mother corrected that notion, I went all woozy and threw a tantrum of protest. I sat on the toilet, looking through tearfully blurry eyes at my feet high above the floor. One day my feet would touch the floor. I was beside myself and desperate for this not to be true.

### Thinking About a Children's Story

We don't know what life was like for Hansel and Gretel; we only know about their trials. The story offers a vivid metaphor for my autobiographical synthesis because their story demonstrates their adaptability and divides their journey into at least three major stages. These stages naturally echo my life stages, which I refer to as, 'Dispensing of Existence (Lifton 1969), Reclaiming of Existence, and Reframing of Existence.' Both of the children represent aspects of me. For the untold parts of the story, I lend parts of my own experience.

In my version of their home life, they are happy, and both of their parents love them. Their Mommy and Daddy are new parents, and so they rely somewhat on the books of Dr. Spock (1903-98). Mommy and Daddy recently began their careers, and money is tight. The combination of inexperience, preoccupation, and a limited budget are real obstacles of which the children aren't fully aware. The children are sweet, curious, creative and happily amuse themselves, but they are also highly sensitive. Mommy and Daddy sometimes feel frustrated because the children often fuss about every tiny detail, like how a sock feels when it's twisting around in their shoe. With increasing frequency, the children feel that their delicate needs are neglected, and like children, they blame themselves for everything around them, and then they feel ashamed of their sensitivities.

### Orientations for Being a Thinker in 'The Great Journey'

In this research, I sought to find my way of orienting in my "lifeworld" (Scharmer, 2015) to be conscious of who was analyzing the collected data about my thoughts. I recalled that while training to teach art for Kindergarten through twelfth grades, I was elated to learn that Howard Gardner (2011) offered alternatives to the linear IQ measurement with Multiple Intelligences. His theory helped me see and celebrate the gifts of my students, and it helped me forgive myself for struggling in school. The theory of Multiple Intelligence challenges the idea of a static IQ. Gardner proposed that there are multiple ways of processing information and educators understood with the difference between intelligences and learning modalities. The former is the way that we get information inside our brain; the latter is how we move the information forward. Verbal-linguistic, Logical Mathematic, Visual-spatial, Naturalistic, Bodily-kinesthetic, Interpersonal, & Intrapersonal & Intrapersonal constitute Multiple Intelligences. Learning modalities are identified

as visual, auditory, kinesthetic, impulsive, reflective. I resonate with Visual-Spatial and Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligences and generally favor visual, reflective, learning modalities, depending on the subject. When opportunities to use my Bodily-Kinesthetic modality of choice, Tactile-Manual can suffice, as in making art with my hands. Hand and eye coordination is very Bodily-Kinesthetic.

However, distinguishing my intelligence left me wondering about my style of interaction with my environment, and I don't mean being an artistic person. Two years ago, in my first semester of studies in Creative and Critical Thinking Master of Arts Program, CCT, at UMass/Boston, we surveyed orientations of mind. Intelligence and Dispositions were the topic of one break off session with two classmates. The disposition of "Criticality" (Davies, Barnett, 2015) resonated strongly with the three of us. I already knew my intellectual gifts and preferred modality of learning, and now I knew about my orientation to the world.

"Critical thinking generally relates to the cognitive disposition of reflection and consideration on deciding upon actions and beliefs. The name, 'criticality' expands critical thinking to incorporate an individual's thinking style with their identity and participation in the world," said Davies and Barnett. I found that 'Criticality' is a disposition because it describes a person's orientation and engagement to their world. In the case of Criticality, the individual senses opportunities to have a positive moral influence and finds ways to manifest them. A disposition is not the same as a personality, which is a set of qualities that distinguish the personality.

The description of Criticality was close but left me looking for something more emotional and feeling oriented. I continued by searching myself for the parts of me at play in the question, "If I'm tracing my thoughts from early childhood to the present, I must know what types of thoughts I'm more likely to entertain, how I process stimuli and how I assign meaning. So, what type of thinker am I? What are my proclivities and traits?" My deep internalization sometimes to the extent of fatigue, propensity for melancholy due to watching beauty and sensing its temporal limits, anxiety from keeping track of too many details, peak highs of inspiration and awe for the mysterious became an obvious clue. I Googled 'empathy' and 'sensitivity,' and there was, *'Highly Sensitive Person.'* The last time I looked this up I was trying to understand my occasional

agoraphobia, but I left it at that. I'm interested that the topic reappears for this research. Could serendipity be assisting me?

### The Blessings and Hazards of Sensitivity

A 'Highly Sensitive Person,' HSP, identified and named by Dr. Elaine Aron (2017), is a personality or temperamental trait involving heightened sensitivity of the nervous system causing deeper and often slower processing of stimuli, and engagement of deep cognitive processes. Information, in my experience, has an inseparable emotional tone, making personal and intellectual growth like two notes that make a chord. Dr. Aron's research indicates that when this processing isn't consciously done, it surfaces as intuition.

The HSP temperamental trait is found deep in a person's DNA. Twenty percent of the population, regardless of gender, are believed to have this gene. The gene trait is hereditary, though not necessarily from generation to generation. The effect of the gene is visible in a person's identifying characteristics as symptoms of extreme perception and overwhelm, caused by sounds and noises, scents, easily disrupted and light sleep, often considered shy by others. The positive side of the temperament includes careful and deep processing of information, which is sometimes 'slower' than others processing, a rich and complex inner life, often spiritually keen, an aptitude for contemplation and appreciation of aesthetics. Way before Industrialist and Capitalist society, paraphrasing Dr. Aron, these individuals were often employed as advisors to monarchy, counselors to the military, priests, and librarians.

So, I imagined that Hansel and Gretel left home because they didn't feel adequately seen and nurtured, as is often the case for a Highly Sensitive Child. Dr. Aron acknowledges that the experience of HSPs whose parents don't understand that their child has the trait, or don't take the needed time to celebrate their child's differences, often report feeling undervalued and in some cases, utterly neglected. Of course, if a parent knew the scientifically proven facts about their child, they would most likely change their parenting style immediately. Hansel and Gretel's Mommy and Daddy never heard of HSPs, and the children left home because they didn't feel completely known and loved. They wanted to find their places in the world, but how does one do that if they've never been reflected by their parents?

### The Swimming Pool & Its Impression on Me

Before sharing more reveries, I want to clarify that my childhood was ordinary. Apparently, my sensitivity was not so ordinary and so, certain things overstimulated me. My mother tells me that at age two, I fell into my grandparents' swimming pool and was underwater for a dangerous lapse of time. Nearly drowning is, to say the least, overwhelming for everyone, so I imagine being underwater must've been absolutely terrifying for myself as an HSP toddler. The story goes that my uncle jumped in the pool fully clothed and plucked me out. Children fall and frighten their parents; this is typical. What is remarkable to me is that we integrate these experiences into our bodies.

I'm not the first to propose that experiences are store-housed as implicit or latent memories of grocery shopping, tooth brushing, skiing, perfecting sleight-of-hand magic tricks, rigging up communication cables, rescuing animals, reading, along with the contexts for each of these activities. The underlying emotional memories are easy to dismiss because they compress into quiet somatic murmurs, rather than verbal and shareable stories that can be processed with a helper. The thoughts and beliefs that arose from my early childhood ordeal cannot be explicitly ascertained because it happened before my verbal language developed. Instead, a sequence of interesting responses to the accompanying sensations of submersion and suffocation inevitably left impressions in me, body, mind, and spirit. In early childhood, a person's body, mind and spirit are inseparable experiences. Precious days within this time period are *entrees* into the world for a new person and affect sensitivity tolerances from that time onward. I've heard some people consider that even the experience of being born leaves significant, though undeterminable, impressions on a new human being.

Let's continue with Hansel and Gretel, assuming that they safely climbed out of the water, coughed and sputtered until they felt good enough to carry on. At this point, Hansel remembers the pebble trail and traces them back to a safe spot to rest that isn't nearly as comfy as their beds at home. In their sleep, the pebbles fall out of Hansel's pocket, and they get lost once again, this time, much deeper in the dark woods.

### Threatened Personal Boundaries

When I was about five years old, my little friends and I were on the floor watching Sesame Street. Little Jimmy started crying. I noticed, but my healthy personal boundaries kept me from feeling obligated to soothe him because he wasn't my baby. However, my babysitter, Grammy, yelled to me from the kitchen to see what Little Jimmy needed. I declined to do so, and she swooped into the room, picked me up by the wrist and slapped my leg until it burned and told me to get under the dining room table. After what felt like hours, my friends came to rescue me. Grammy caught them talking to me and prolonged my punishment. I sat there long enough to accept that I deserved what happened. Children blame themselves for events in their world because they aren't intellectually developed enough to know that the world doesn't revolve around them.

### ACEs & Little "t" Traumas

Children are resilient, but that doesn't mean they overcome hardships like well-adjusted and mature adults with coping skills and confidants. An Adverse Childhood Experience, ACE, is not necessarily acutely traumatic but it affects the child's sense of safety and continues into the rest of their lives until it's cared for. Knowing the effect of an ACE on a person is impossible until symptoms of unease arise, and even then, tending to the impression on the mind may require considerable time and dedication. ACEs or little "t" traumas, are events that disrupt the child's sense of stability and security. (Little t and Big T traumas" are used widely by therapists and mind body practitioners.) Parents getting divorced, a family member becoming ill, moving, difficulty in school or psychosocial crises are a few examples of life aspects that put enormous strain on a child. Attempts to cope with stress and adversity becomes the Ego that protects the child until it impedes maturation in adulthood. Either the individual remains hidden within the primary means of coping or tears down the impediment with psychological resources to break away from that unconscious script (Tolle 2005).

### PTSD

Trauma has varying levels of intensity and effects from one individual to the next. Exposure to ACEs or Traumas early in life are suspected to be causes for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD, in adulthood if it's not already present. PTSD tends to occur when an individual perceives that they have no control over their safety and their existence is in danger. Some health



professionals prefer to use the term, "Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome" because the response is not a disorder, it's actually a healthy response to a severe threat, which causes the individual to remain on high alert. Complex PTSD occurs when a person is subjected to chronic abuse with multi-sensory hooks and triggers. Some intuitive people believe that their abilities arose out of needing to use their sensory input that can't be defined by reason to anticipate danger as for self-preservation due to traumatic events that led to Complex PTSD.

### Intuition

There are different kinds of intuition: knowing where to move your rook because you have practiced chess for years (Kahneman, 2015), having a hunch that someone will come home in a bad mood, predicting a transformative world event, choosing the second door without a rationale, and moving to the world fluidly, seemingly unfazed by complexity. And of course, there are the pervasive fake, annoying woo-woo, and potentially dangerous forms of intuition. I'm suspicious of almost all types, excluding results of well-practiced skills and coincidental hunches. I'm currently trying out the 'woo-woo' kind. There's nothing to report yet, except that since embarking on this research I've followed up on every single nudge that entered my mind, such as, 'take that item along today,' 'tell her about this thing, asap' and I've enjoyed listening to myself. Apparently, listening is essential to encourage the intuitive voice to come out of hiding. One outcome that I have observed is that I've followed every little nudge during the time of reflecting, reading and writing for this paper. More than once I hit a wall but relaxed completely and a literature resource appeared in an unlikely place. If that sort of thing happened more frequently I imagine everything would be different for me. Even though I don't know how to recognize them right now, there are apparently indications that my intuition is still at work.

### PTSD & Intuition

According to the dissertation written by Susan Santon, of Syracuse University in 2016, *Intuition: A Silver Lining for Clinicians with Complex Trauma*, her research anticipated that complex trauma histories are connected to heightened intuition, in higher number than intuition without histories of trauma. Results of the mixed methods of Santon's research, qualitative and quantitative, indicate significant potential correlations between empathy and intuition, part of 'Post Traumatic Growth,' an increased interpersonal and intrapersonal connectedness.

## My Precognition

In spite of having the attributes assumed to match intuition, I've held the whole notion of intuition with increasing skepticism as I aged. There was one time at about age six when distinct precognition came. Precognition is an intuitive thought that foretells a future event. Repeated visits to this memory with my eyes closed in concentration helped the details emerge from the unlit place where I stowed it for decades. The language used to describe it here is close to the wording that feels like the way that my young self might have spoken.

*"I'm having fun playing in the hallway...everything is quiet, but I know Mommy and Daddy are downstairs.... A white swishy cloud, a nice ghost lady just floated up to me, close to my arm. She is whispering in my ear, but it's kind of loud in my head. She's saying, "Hello, you're safe, I'm not scary. I just want to tell you what is going to happen. When you grow up, you will get very sick, and everyone would know it but you." Now I feel scared and sad in my tummy. The lady is telling me that everyone will help me know, and then I'll be all better. This will help me learn things and then teach people what I know. She's saying that everything will be very hard for a while. That's okay, I understand. My tummy doesn't hurt now."*

Then I went to the bathroom and washed my hands and then I asked if I would be "rewarded" in my childhood language, meaning, 'would there be comfort at the end?'

And I remember looking at the edge of the sink with the bathroom door in the corner of my view. A series of flashing images passed. I didn't visually perceive the images. I sensed them pass between myself and the door.

She said yes. I accepted what she said as real and true.

There is no rationale for my reckoning that the flashing images were breadcrumbs. As I grew up, I tried to put the memory out of my mind because I didn't know what happened and didn't want to draw attention to myself for fear of being called a weirdo by my friends or worrying my mother. Suppressing the memory and denying it happened didn't keep me from encountering more breadcrumbs. Later the flashes came again, one at a time and very distinctly.

In the following days, Hansel and Gretel use a loaf of bread to mark their steps. The bread-crumbs are farther apart than the pebbles were, so they pay close attention not to miss a single crumb. I wonder if they were aware of their intuition, or if they explained it away as I did.

### Breadcrumb One

When I was about five or six, playing pretend with a handful of other children at my babysitter's house, a pivotal moment of intense clarity about my life's vocation came over me. I stepped into a director or facilitator role in our play-pretend scenario. I understood a larger picture and enlisted my little friends to shift the drama in a more interesting direction. My entire body felt like the flash of a bulb, and everything paused for a white moment. Eyes dilated, I told myself to remember this for later.

### Breadcrumb Two

One day, in Mrs. Sambucco's second-grade a visiting teacher came to class. We moved all of the tables and chairs to the side and moved our bodies to form the letters of the alphabet, animals, and bridges with a partner. We were all actively engaged and very serious about our formations and talked about what worked and what didn't at the end of the lesson. "This is how I learn!" I exclaimed to myself, and I wrapped myself around the visiting teacher's legs to tell her that I wanted to have her job when I grew up. It didn't occur to me to ask the name of her job, and I've explored high and low to find the vocation that resembled what she gave me. That single day lay-ered upon my earlier pivotal moment and reinforced my certainty about how I would feel when doing my life's work. These impressions are my beacons to my vocation as a teacher, artist and performer.

### My Traumas & Their Effects on Me

The effect of trauma in my life and on my level or type of intuition is impossible to measure, but I include it here because of my hunch that my early acute traumas heightened my intuition and desire to communicate. With my discoveries in therapy, my persistent upsetting somatic memories of suffocating and not being able to communicate correlate with falling into a pool at age two and not being able to move, breathe or cry out. This full body helplessness might align with a compelling feeling to move as expression of being and communicating, as if no other means

have the capacity to express my internal processes. I surmise that Grammy's harsh and impulsive discipline added a layer of dissociation and the need to recruit intuition for protection. I'm learning how the foundation of my birth trait, HSP, and disquieting events *probably* induced my intuition and need to move, process information and express my creativity. I don't intend to make a firm hypothesis that any of these things link in a causal chain. I'm most interested in how the possibility of my so-called intuition runs through all of these aspects like a connective thread. These experiences combined with my newly identified HSP personality type, and the boons of my traumas as described in the following diagram.

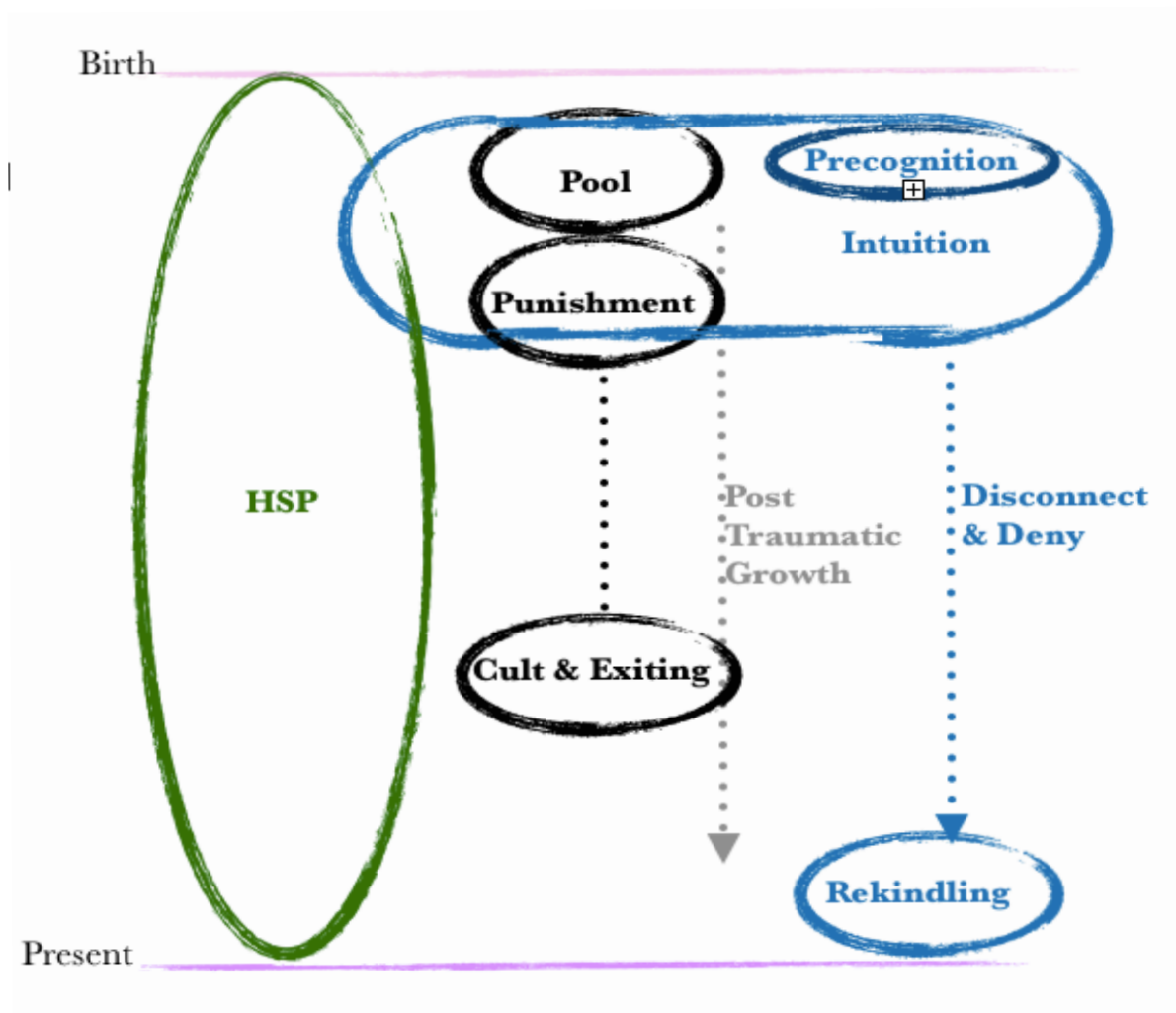


Diagram 2: Relationship of Events and Their Probable Causes in My Lifetime

### Making Meaning While Collecting Breadcrumb Clues

When I think of making meaning, two names come to mind: Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Elie Wiesel (1928-2016, Romanian born, Auschwitz survivor, Nobel Laureate). Sometimes I think the contemporary work of Csikszentmihalyi is given all the credit for identifying flow states and meaning-making. However, Wiesel previously wrote about how he and a few other Auschwitz prisoners lifted their view above the conditions of the terror with their imaginations and reinterpreted each blow to their existence as an absurdly entertaining game. Wiesel declares in his memoir, *Night*, that the alternative meaning they created saved their lives and other prisoners perished. Both Csikszentmihalyi and Wiesel observed with an objective stance of fascination for the horror around them.

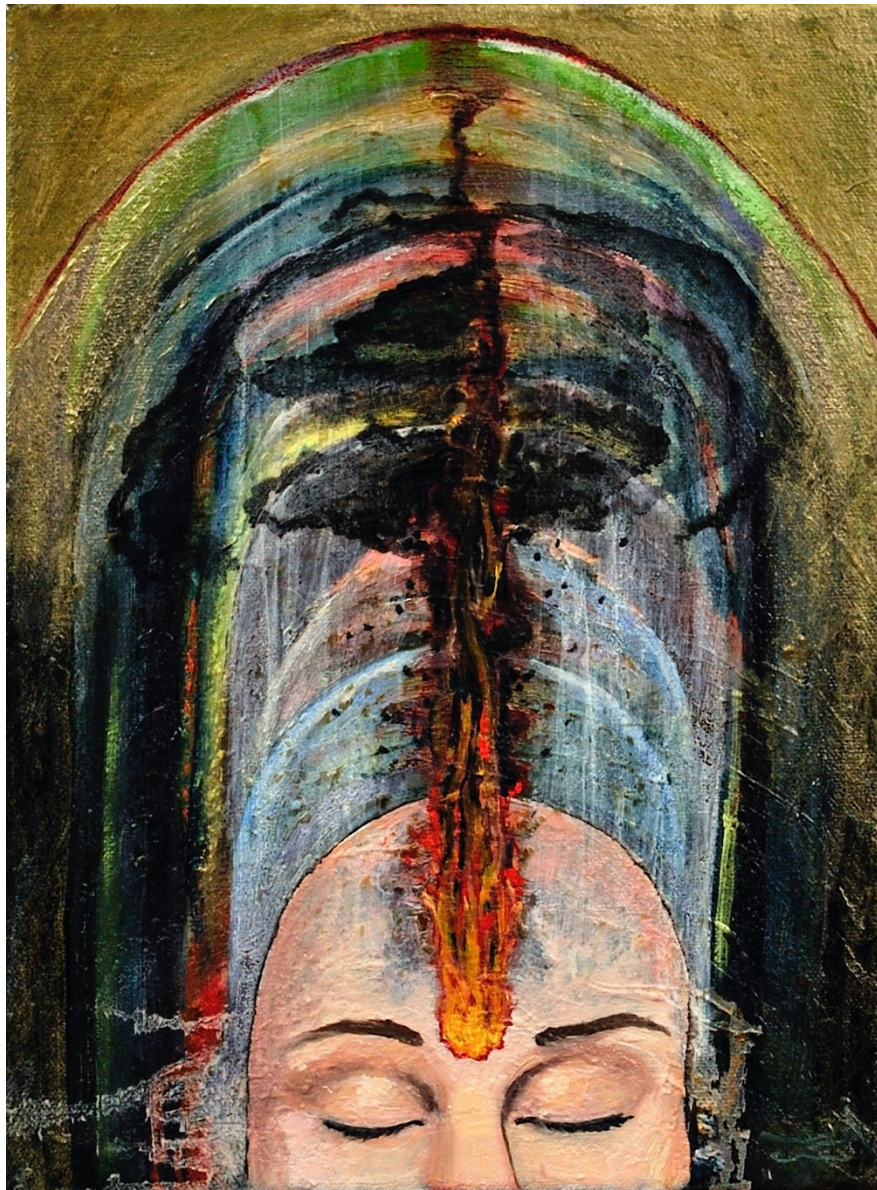
After many nights of wandering and being lost and hungry, the children end up finding something more wonderful than anything they imagined before. A house made of gingerbread which they immediately began to nibble on, as they were very hungry, indeed.

### Beguiled by the Gingerbread House

The gingerbread house beguiled the unsuspecting children at a time I imagine they needed food and safety. Instead, the house set the stage for mortal danger. In a rendition by Andrew Lang (1889), the siblings ate milk and sugared pancakes with apples and nuts and then laid to sleep in little white beds. Over all, I think of my lovely childhood like this sweet image. Later, however, I joined my cult without the typical recruitment by other members, just as Hansel and Gretel willingly walked into the house. I unsuspectingly observed everyone around me like an anthropological voyeur. The organization offered great things for a young artist without a solid plan for income. The group's thought exercises in the early days of my involvement fascinated me and drew me closer. They elaborated the weird ideologies skillfully so that members' critical thinking slowly, subtly evaporated, and to this day, the highest leaders have yet to confess their deceit.

The Witch acts as the mythical Trickster, a "creature" or "being" that dispassionately creates chaos for humans thereby causing them either tragedy or triumph if they develop their personal skills to mature and overcome. She starves Hansel forced Gretel to work for several days until they courageously step outside their passivity and use a creative problem-solving motto, "In what

way might we escape?” Hansel uses a deceased predecessor's bone in his cage to fool the nearly blind witch to think he wasn't fatter, which spared his life for another night. Meanwhile, Gretel cried but understood that saving their lives was up to her; she had to kill the witch. Similarly, when I finally learned that I committed to a cult, the Trickster in my life, I needed to come to terms with my options quickly: to lean toward my cult peers to cope with my existential crisis or take a leap and abandon my life.



*Exhibit #4. 'Attempting Psychotic Perfection', oil on canvas, 9x13", made by the author, 2005*

### Dispensing of Existence

People who know nothing about cults assume that individuals join cults due to weakness or gullibility. This is no more true than individuals marrying an unsuitable mate, taking the wrong job or making poor financial investments. People who have been attracted to cults are highly tolerant of ambiguity, yet delight in nuance, are curious seekers of insight, and perpetually observant. The problem is that their wonderful dispositions, behaviors, and traits are subverted by cults. The individual is possessed by a fully indoctrinated automation, and their identity nearly vanishes.

According to Robert Jay Lifton's "Criteria of Thought Reform" as identified in his interviews and analysis of POWs of the Korean War, and individuals who fled China after being subjected to indoctrination, "Dispensing of Existence" means, "The group claims the prerogative to decide who exists and who does not. Usually held non-literally, this means that those outside the group are unspiritual, worldly, satanic, 'unconscious,' and that they must be converted to the ideas of the group or they will be lost. Even if they are family members of the indoctrinated individual, they must be rejected. The totalist environment always draws a sharp line between those whose right to existence can be recognized and those who possess no such right. The conviction that there is just one path to true existence, just one valid mode of being, and that all others are invalid or false is plainly ludicrous to a critical thinker, which indicates the effectiveness of the psychological coercion and brainwashing. For the individual, the polar emotional conflict is the ultimate existential one of 'being versus nothingness.' The only way to security is to live with the idea, consciously or unconsciously held, "I believe, therefore, I am."

This reflects my experience, and I experienced additional layers of denial. One of the overtly expressed tenets of the group is that life has no meaning, an intentionally vague concept. The leaders of my group used both meanings simultaneously or evoked one meaning without clarifying which they intended- if they even distinguished in their minds. My leaders were more deeply indoctrinated than my peers and me. The collapse of language limited our thinking and to a narrow track of concepts, always leading back to the rightness of the teaching.

Another level, directly affecting me, was the constant message that the way I did something, or thought, or moved through the world was insufficient, and at times, pathetic in the eyes of the

group. Or, that I was asked to do something inappropriate and then later admonished for not declining to do the task, while my skills were either unseen or co-opted for the benefit of the group. As turbulent as the signals were, I maintained some amount of continuity in myself by storing away doubts, in the corner of my daily thinking, on what is known as, “the shelf of doubt.” For some cult members, the shelf of doubt eventually becomes too burdened and breaks down, and the individual either leaves the group or has a psychotic break. All of these ways of having my existence dispensed in addition to the pool incident and the punishment leads to either annihilation or reclamation.

During my time in my cult, I left my job to commit to supporting the “Critical Mass” that would supposedly save humanity. I was evicted from my apartment, left my friends and roots in my community, and moved back home to my parents’ house. They observed me closely and stole my journals to give to Kevin Garvey, a professional exit counselor, so that he could study and prepare to meet me.

The last significant layer of dispensing of existence that I experienced was when I exited the cult. By this time, my daily life entirely occupied the demands of the leaders. Exit counseling is a process led by a highly skilled counselor who encourages a cult member to begin thinking independently and with a view of the group’s dubious actions on the world stage. Even with Kevin's moment by moment checking on my well-being, his respectful requests for my consent to continue, the exit counseling process was still incredibly traumatic. The exit process abruptly broke the continuity of reality that I came to believe.

I’ve heard many ways to describe what it’s like when a person finds out they are in a cult. Implied here is that NO ONE knows they are in a cult. I think of the exit counselling as undergoing major surgery without anesthesia. One is aware of everything between moments of black out, and then sees the vital organ removed and laying in the pan. The organ is still attached to the patient- it is their understanding of themselves and their “lifeworld” (Scharmer, 2018). Continuing in the realm of non-cult life meant agreeing to the death of a false self whom is loved and also fighting for one’s real life. At that time in recovery it’s intensely difficult to discern which self is really real. A person in exit counseling is wide awake for the whole procedure, holding witness



to ask, "Who are we when we do what we do?" In this case, the question is, "What the hell did I do to get *here, of all places?!?*"

In the first year of my recovery, I devised methods of tracking my panic attacks and strange thoughts on the kitchen calendar. I worked with a steady intention to see decreasing numbers of tick marks every few days. I feel that I healed myself from invasive thoughts by simply observing what happened with reflective practice and assessment of data on my calendar.

### Reclaiming My Existence

When I was a child and later in art school, I enjoyed taking things apart to know how they were made. Being a member of a cult is like being taken apart. In healing the person finds out what they are made of, what thoughts and beliefs are made of, and what it means to be more aware of these big questions than most people. So far, my paper considers my existence as my mind understood, but true reclaiming is a full-bodied discovery of being solid matter taking up of space and expressing autonomy through freedom of action.

The witch showed her true nature immediately after the children get out of their soft beds. The story recounts. The Trickster Witch starved Hansel and forced Gretel to work for several days until they courageously stepped outside their passivity and asked, "In what way can we escape?" They adapted what was available around them, when their perception of self and agency shifted. Hansel used the deceased predecessor's bone in his cage. He fooled the nearly blind witch to think he wasn't any fatter, which spared his life for another night.

Meanwhile, Gretel cried with fear but understood that saving their lives was in her charge. She had to kill The Trickster Witch. Similarly, when I finally learned that I made a commitment to a cult, I needed to come to terms with my options quickly: to lean toward my cult peers to cope with my existential confusion, or take a leap and abandon the person I became.

### Calling Upon My Desire to Connect

The part of me that was able to persist, let's say, the little inkling that made Hansel and Gretel evade The Trickster Witch, gives me awe for our instinct to survive, regardless of how dire the

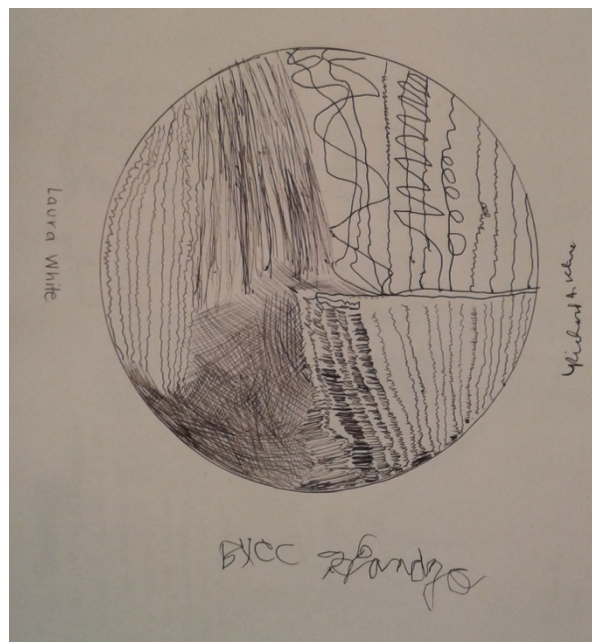
pain. Sometimes the instinct is on the physical level, when one considers how the entire body rallies all of its resources for survival.

I feel that remember the voice of my precognition and the things she said gave me the curiosity to keep stepping forward in my recovery. Maybe the voice was God or a “fairy godmother” or even a goblin who visits imaginative children. Either way, it helped me find meaningful things to guide my attention when my strength waned and hope those happy pivotal moments came to fruition. I hold all of these ponderings lightly.

Without really knowing how my disposition, modalities and personality all create a base line for my entry into the world, ascertaining a definitive answer isn’t possible. Questions are more potent when they remain open ended and even unanswerable.

#### Reclaiming One's Identity seems to Take an Entire Lifetime

Even though my background is that of a white woman with accompanying privileges, the feeling of isolation and suffering persisted and eventually transformed slowly as I kept walking toward recovery. After many group therapies and impromptu conversations with people I'd never have guessed I'd relate to, I saw evidence of shared experiences and heart aches. Our experiences



*Exhibit # 5. A drawing that I made with Chris' and 'Richard'*

looked different on the surface, but the other people described their lives in the same words that I used. In the early days of my recovery, I was fortunate to attend outpatient group therapy for adults with various developmental challenges and ‘unstable environmental factors.’ One day while reeling through a particularly sensitive issue, ‘Chris,’ a young man with Downs Syndrome reminded me just to be myself, and he was right. “David”, another fellow group participant who had Schizophrenia as well as perfect pitch and the uncanny ability to memorize music after hearing it once, helped me confront my debilitating stage fright. They were valuable members of my recovery team and precious in their own merits.

Another unlikely person I connected to was a woman I privately named, “Sea Witch.” She rented out large umbrellas to beach visitors and buried the long umbrella pole deep in the sand so that it didn't blow away. I couldn't do this even with my routine of rigorous daily exercise. She seemed older than me but full of vim. Her body was tiny, wiry and strong. Her hair was long, tangled, salted, and bleached white-blond from all day sun, and her skin was deep brown. She wore a bikini, spoke loudly, like someone who pushed through everything life thrust at her. We sat under her umbrella and shared stories for at least two hours. We commiserated about the health care system, the ways others judged us, the distortion we felt due to our poverty, abuses we sustained, mental illness, and our need for safe disclosure. It goes to show that you can never accurately estimate how a person lives by their appearance. I know that I looked immune to all that. Even on vacation with my husband, I was right in the middle of my version of her life.

I wonder what Hansel and Gretel on the days following their escape. The traditional story skips their reassimilation. Did they laugh because they were now free and continued eating the house? Did they hide behind a rock and tremble? When did they decide to keep walking and where did they walk?

Revealing this story is not to provoke pity or worry. My existence isn't full of anguish, and the painful times allowed me opportunities to see and do highly unexpected things. As I formed my analysis of the Intersecting Processes Chart, the good and bad days often commingled. Joy happens even when we are challenged. I define joy as a mode of being that transforms and elevates

everything to opportunities to learn, build character, connect with the Divine. In the movie, *E-Motion*, the transformation of negative emotions is considered joy.

Even with the most challenging portions of my life I had fantastic experiences. I learned to make art with bronze, oil paint, video, and costume, created my own undergraduate major, received merit awards, had a broken nose twice, and walked across one of the most prestigious stages in Maryland. I placed a prayer scroll inside the hollow of an 18-foot wooden carving of the Japanese god, Fudo Myo'o. I quit a decent job and was evicted from my apartment and in the following year worked at the White House as a calligrapher. At a White House Christmas party for the press and media, I met Geraldo Rivera, who made an expose about my cult during his early career, which I watched on VHS years later. I grabbed the opportunity to thank him for that expose because it was the primary thing that made me doubt my cult and open my mind for alternatives to their "truth." As I spoke to him, I wondered if he understood the irony of our situation. I appeared on a television news interview, spoke to the Maryland House of Delegates about ensuring safety for students of state universities, I appeared in foreign and domestic magazines and newspapers, exhibited my art in quirky places, lived in six cities, married, divorced, and traveled through Mexico, France, and England. I've competed in three different styles of martial art tournaments, studied Buddhist and Hindu texts and earned a five-hundred-hour yoga teacher certification. In addition to teaching about 350 children and adults how to draw, I taught art to teenagers and adults with developmental disabilities. I practiced diligently at getting over my paranoia and fear of people, sang in a few cabarets and modeled for artists. I discovered my extroversion and began to realize that the joys and anguish were preparing me to 'hold space' and make art about shared experiences.

### Reframing My Existence

Because of my exposure to people of many backgrounds, I've been able to talk with a familiarity of challenges that folks deal with daily and they are in need of affirmation. Now I live in Baltimore, a city with a long history of racial division and I'm glad to have some insight about subordination and microaggressions, which are essentially components of cultic indoctrination. Yet, I know better than to presume to know what non-white folks (or any folks at all) experience, just as most people don't know anything about mine.

My ability to be present for these conversations and gain connection and purpose from them is precious to me. I want to invest all of this in my art and show the exquisite vulnerability of people, rather than repeat versions of my narrative. Loss and recovery led me to meet people of all kinds and transformed them into resources for creativity. Just as I used to take things apart to know what they were made of, I have a strong sense of what I am made of because I have been taken apart. I have a strong sense of what we humans are capable of enduring and overcoming because I've watched others' existence be dispensed and then reclaimed. Opportunities to confront false perception and overturn them contain the most potent molecule of creativity; the pivotal moment of transformation.

The woman's voice in my precognition and The Trickster Witch might have colluded to find out what humans think and believe, and how we behave under those pretexts. Do we hide or fight, become jaded or too porous? Does our perception change our thinking, or does our thinking change our perception? Does our perception change our personality and orientation? Do we carry our bodies differently when our outlook shifts and evolves? What happens to our inner stories, the quiet, unconscious ones that float into our dreams.

I began to see inklings of my past coalescing into possibility. My exit counselor, Kevin, told me that learning is the best way to recover from brainwashing - to literally use the mind to heal the brain. The best way to know one's own thoughts is to learn. The best way to heal one's heart is for the heart to continue pumping blood.

### Being Moved

My healing community helped me anticipate and manage common challenges in recovery. But the psychotherapy approach was often too difficult because my thoughts wouldn't come together in words without exacerbating my PTSD, since brainwashing anchors in verbal concepts.

Eventually, my therapist added dance therapy to my program. We started with insignificant movements, like swaying our arms. Gradually, I could convey what happened to my therapist through or because of this or that motion. I already had a high aptitude for dance and found that movement expressed far more than words alone could in a much shorter time. The movements seemed to release thoughts to my consciousness where I could relate to them directly. I wonder if

movement was the communication tool I'd been reaching for all of my life and then it came to me as a healing modality. Intuition, the woman's voice in my left ear, told me that movement would be the communication tool I'd be reaching for all my life. *Somehow, I know* that my search for communication using movement, as well as the movements themselves, are also breadcrumbs.

I find it impossible to escape the theory that deliberate aesthetic movement, or dance for those of us who have traditional training, is the expression of emotion- the combination of energy and motion. The therapeutic processes, Body Psychotherapy and Authentic Movement make use of the preverbal, the implicit and the unconscious narratives and impressions we gather. In the practice of Feldenkrais, a therapeutic movement modality I have only read about, the objective for intervention is the integration of body and emotion. This science is based on an understanding that the body is self-organizing, and "emotion" means, "to stir, agitate, move," so that we constantly organize for equilibrium and are also in some form of motion. Our biology has a prime directive for stability. Our body is akin to the unconscious mind, and emotions are a symptom of past events.

The trained dancers I interviewed declare that the majority of society has it in the wrong order. Even though they were each interviewed separately and studied in different conservatories, they both presented complex theories by respected intellectuals, Ponty and Heidegger, who state that the body knows well before the conscious mind. Laura Day, a teacher of intuition, explains this with regards to our extra sensory perception, and Dr. Elaine Aron describes heightened sensitivity within the neurological sense receptors throughout the body. I'm musing that movement, deliberate or unconscious, gross or subtle, creates a juncture for body, emotion, behavior, affect, personal orientation, health, intuition, knowledge and identity to meet. I infer that making meaning of life happens in the body.

A video by Feldenkrais practitioner, Matty Wilkinson, discusses a developmental perspective on the art of learning through movement. He guides his clients through somatic processes that enhance abilities to adjust to novelty and variation, attention to self, inhibition of an unnecessary effort, process orientation and "mapping" (proprioception), curiosity and intention, and rest and

acceptance. Interesting that each of these movement patterns supports the full range of well-being of the individual. Karen R Clark, an operatic singer and vocal teacher, desires to expand her clients' pallets of sensation which connects them to their powers of thinking, moving, sensing, feeling, and breathing. Clark teaches singers how to hear their singing and to listen 'behind the scene,' from the point of view of the body.

### Integrating the Story of Trauma, More Learning as Healing

Following 9/11 and the new awareness of PTSD as a real experience, I was diagnosed with Complex PTSD, which gave me a new framework with which to examine myself. The community of researchers, Stephen Porges, Peter Levine, my ex-cult healing community, the study of yoga & martial arts and other holistic practices, exposed me to theories that bridged my love of dance and movement with intellectual theories, among them, The Poly Vagal Nerve Theory, and The Theory of Neuroplasticity.

Dance and movement theater workshops helped me overcome agoraphobia and social anxieties. Specific workshops delved into power dynamics through the art of clowning and masque, or autobiographical solo performances that incorporated theater games and exercises about daily events that seem mundane until they are transformed into a show.

The lenses of research, holistic practices and performing workshops were all breadcrumbs on the way to my childhood vision of being a Performance Artist. However, the path still had more to unfold.

### I Walked to Grad School

Initially, my desire to study creative and critical thinking came from a need to engage in something productive, and to dive into the deep restoration of the critical thinking that I lost in the cult. Within my first semester in grad school, my conflicting presuppositions became apparent. Not in the way that two ideas can be held in tension with one another, rather, in the way that one thought had to go. I was startled to discover that in spite of my conscious dedication to be alert to my presumptions, I believed things that didn't align with my conscious values. In Philosophical

Thinking, the need for citing etiologies became apparent to my relief, because my cult adulterated philosophies, and ignorant people outside of my cult boasted about things probably knew nothing about. Dialog Processes gave me a place to put my mediation and study of Buddhism to use, even though the class content had nothing to do with spirituality. Also, I learned more ways to envision outcomes in difficult conversations that usually spiraled in defensiveness or manipulation. Most advantageously, my writing "voice" gained confidence.

In the community of a new school, I found myself managing intense anxiety all over again. I drank beer during class with my prescribed beta-blockers to be able to participate. My therapist taught me a slogan to cope with grad school's inherent disruption of everything you think you know. Living in Baltimore again nearly crushed my spirit because it's where I joined my cult, and I never meant to live here again. Alas, life brought me here anyway. I moved into my city residence in the same time-frame that class began.

This city doesn't withhold the ugliness mixed with its beauty. It's a place where mud covers large gems. Similar to what I learned from my intersecting processes chart showing times of anguish and exciting opportunities, the gems are even more precious *because they come from the mud*. Passionate individuals and visionary non-profits constantly lean into problematic dynamics unique to this city's history, and they actually make improvements.

Baltimore became a supplemental living laboratory for my school curriculum. In *Creative Thinking* class, I discovered fifteen non-profit organizations within a two-mile radius of my house, which inspired me to get outside more. My exposure to Baltimore extended in *Process of Realization* and *Research and Engagement* because I conducted interviews with individuals involved in areas related to my coalescing path.

Finally, in *Criticism of Literature and Art*, I endeavored to return to my love of Performance Art after giving it up after art school. Inexplicably, I decided to swap out "Who gets to be a critical thinker" with "Who gets to be a *critical mover*" and began devising equations and theories of practice to convince my classmates. I was convinced, but they were not. Jeremy, my teacher, removed the sting of discouraging feedback by pointing out that it was okay that my ideas were



half-baked for the time being, in fact my ideas were *supposed to be* only half baked by that point in the semester. With leeway to let things incubate longer, I took more creative risks. Little by little, my heart opened to thinking about making Performance Art again. From this point on I describe my performances in the present tense because this is Action Research in Hindsight, and that process allows me access to my past for examination.

Now I am completing my Capstone Synthesis and soon will fully immerse into the community that I've lived in for three years. It feels strange to admit that this particular graduate program is one of my breadcrumb clues. That voice in my ear cryptically suggested long ago that I would be in the company of contemplative peers. I disclaimed her message but also skeptically looked out for the qualities that she described, just in case they appeared. On some level, I understood that at a specific time all the scattered clues needed to be collected and interpreted. That time is right now.

I've dedicated my study of CCT to the aspiration of being a responsible artist who is fully aware of the messages that she releases to her audiences, and sensitivity for the implications of this work. It's hard for me to imagine how I could have learned all of the valuable life lessons I have without nearly being annihilated by a cult and leaving it behind. All that I've learned can feed my art, and what I've learned in CCT will help me shape my work and my studio practice conscientiously. How can I believe that a breadcrumb trail guided me through near annihilation and complete dispensing, to reclaiming and reframing for the benefit of my art practice and development? Does believing make a difference?

My vision for the next steps developed from a combination of class discussions and extracurricular ideas that my mind latched onto. I imagine making performances in a field with many people. The gathering is large that participants strain a little to hear one another speak, but a palpable kinship presides. We co-create a performance that tells a story or reflects something special about us, we perform it to ourselves with passerby looking on. They own the process.

The future steps for this research are numerous and intersecting. I'd like to delve more deeply

into the time dimension of performing, and how the perception of time is different while immersed in a process devised for a Performance Piece. I'd like to create a curriculum that delves into embodiment theories of the art form to teach, use performance-making methods to gather people in a dialogic and multi-sensory communication, to find what "works" and to what we can agree. I'd like to understand more deeply the mechanics of how movement helps me and others think, feel and know. I want to find safe and interesting methods to get very close to where Performance Art teases the edge of reality, revisited and interpreted, and literally write down what



Exhibit #5. After "Had I the Heaven's Embroidered Cloths" W.B. Yeats, Ceramic, 6x15", made by the author, 2007.

thinking takes place in that moment. I want to know how to teach others how to get in that space of mind with a much-needed book on metacognition in Performance Art. I qualify myself to write that book. Not least of which, continuing to fill my already rich journal for this research with reflections on readings and diagrams will continue to clarify my analyses in an investment I'm making. My journal is the most important artifact of my research and a precious part of my adult journey.

I find no coincidence that we say, "Take the next step" or "one step at a time," when we approach a daunting endeavor. We say this figuratively, yet, our bodies courageously facing forward and walk into new time frames, sensing, performing, becoming. Hansel and Gretel walk through most of the tale. They are always in motion.

### But Why Me?

Considering the chance that the precognition foretold my walk from childhood through the beguiling cult and out again seems implausible. Here are two ideas in tension that I can't resolve: I don't believe in destiny, but if it's real, then I don't believe we are invited to know our future. People say, "Everything happens for a reason." I don't believe that things magically unfold for us. That is an attitude of privilege which I rebuke. Long chains of cause and effect happen and sweep us into its indifferent flow, just like The Trickster's antics. I still believe life has no particular meaning, but it is meaning-full. We consciously and unconsciously make it that way. However, a woman that I interviewed about intuition and connection with The Divine asked me, "Why *not* you? Why wouldn't a precognition happen for you? Why wouldn't God speak directly to you?" I didn't have an answer because she was introducing my worthiness into my query, rather than just the mechanics of intuition. Part of reclaiming oneself and reframing their trauma after having their existence dispensed is understanding (at least a little) that they are worthy of transforming pain into joy.

The Biblical poem of Job also illustrates how Job reframes his challenged existence. I imagine that his performance involved some level of "Optimal Experience" (Bonaiuto, Marino, et al. 2016) (the precursor of Csikszentmihalyi's "Flow"), meaning, short intervals when their imagined realities and personas saturated them. The spectacles of the Biblical prophet, Jeremiah, who

smashed jars before audiences, and Ezekiel, who baked bread over human excrement certainly made loud public displays to get their point across. The earliest written account of performance art and meaning-making was Isaiah, who lived for three years without clothing. Their "Sign Acts" delivered political protests with verbal and nonverbal elements, composing "compelling, multi-sensory presentations" that reinforce instruction and ideas in concrete and abstract visual aids. Thinking "prophet" often followed conjures suspicion that eccentricity replaced the individual's mental health, but maybe these men tuned in to something no one else was sensitive enough to perceive.

In my version of Hansel and Gretel, they publicly demonstrate a warning for other families with children after escaping The Witch. The walkers-by look at them askance and laugh, or cautiously listen to the children. Describing the event with words doesn't do the experience justice, and the children don't feel that they are reclaiming and naming their unknowns. Actions and movements must supplement their words.

Given that the works of Ezekiel, and Isaiah rarely come up in conversations about effective performed communication, because Performance Art Theory and History doesn't seem to reach back farther than the "Happenings" of 1950s and 60s. The rawness of the Biblical prophets, like Pre-Performance Artist is the same untreated material of the contemporary artform. Intermediary materials like pen and ink, paint or marble obstruct the immediacy of the body's message. As a trained visual artist and mover, I know that my ideas circulate through very different mental channels when I'm drawing versus walking heel to toe in a straight line. I imagine each of these people were ecstatically watching themselves perform to reclaim their position in their lifeworld and reframe unresolved problems with action. They embodied a contextually useful persona, such as a person or being that smashes pots on government steps or observed their effectiveness, adjusted accordingly, sublimated their intolerable circumstances and transformed themselves into performed art.

They unknowingly employed leadership capacities outlined by Otto Scharmer in his 2007 book, "Theory U." A performer of this artform must hold space, attend with an open mind, connect with their heart to facilitate opening process, be present to the deepest source of themselves,

crystallizing a commitment to purpose and outcome, integrate head, heart and hand in action, and perform, or, “play the macro violin.” Scharmer also instructs performers of dialogue process arts to participating in the unknown, lean into possibility and perhaps even kill the mysterious by giving it a name, as Bogart would say.

Maybe a version of Performance Art is the form of communication Hansel and Gretel played at home before they learned to speak. If they were like me as a child, then they played and pretended in order to translate complexities of their environment into graspable representations. Playacting and thinking creatively prepared myself and the siblings to interact with agility for the journey awaiting.

### My Preferred Way to Communicate, At Last

Performance Art is my preferred way of learning and thinking. In my opinion, it is the ultimate form of critical thinking and metacognition, made visible and sometimes sacred. I find freedom to be my authentic self and momentarily dwell in an observed experience as if the environment I construct is a laboratory with rules, constraints, and possibilities to operate within.

A mental model to illustrate what I mean by a 'constructed laboratory' might look like a circular “stage set.” As creator and performer, I choose a set of actions and movements designed to compel the audience ask why these constraints are present as opposed to alternate limitations, and what might happen if different possibilities were available. Maybe I invite my audience to view from the periphery or within the circle. Let’s imagine a performance I’ve wanted to present lack of access to necessary technology has hindered me. We all encounter a space filled with small points of light hovering in the space. Once our eyes adjust to the darkness the points of light transform to numbers. I anticipate that spellbound audience asks one another of the significance of this change of perception. Hundreds of softly glowing Algebraic equations hover in arm’s reach. While creating the performance I think about what would happen if I respond to the movements of the numbers or if they respond to me, and so what next? When I make a gently sweeping motion with my hand they swirl like snowflakes. If I mumble frantically the numbers and symbols jumble and tangle. What process or message do I want to convey and why? Sight, movement, touch, depth perception, thinking or feeling, and my persona work within the realm

of Math. In my Algebra performance, my audience understands that imaginative space replaces paper, and that not only am I equating, my actions become the thinking and the witness of doing math. As an artist, I bring together every detail that I can conceive to orchestrate this happening.

My preferred type of Performance Art pieces attempts to find a way to *become* the process Algebra in a performance about Algebra, not just move equations around like a teacher at a chalkboard. I think that the audience's sense that a performance has *become* or transformed into something else intricately subjective, and better presented in a follow up paper to avoid more complexity.

Performance Art invites all of me to enter its borderless shape, which allows me to reclaim my unconscious entirety or reframe narratives or ideas that nag at my mind. Deliberate scaffolding with cognitive, intuitive and bodily tools leads me toward a conclusion that is hopefully satisfactory at least until the next iteration of the performance. Thankfully, I don't need to be a trained dancer or an experienced actor; instead, I can deliberately move, or be the embodiment of a thing. In my view, movement is more significant than dance because it's the bare bones and genuine form of disciplined dance training. That means our automated routine is the first layer of movement, the second layer is more self-aware and deliberate, maybe even ready for some kind of audience. A correlation to higher and lower level thinking is that the second layer, the re-stored movements dig deeper and expand wider into an inquiry than shallow lower level thinking, which is generally unaware of itself.

### How to Do Communication Through Movement

Liz Lerman, a dancer and choreographer, is my exemplar of a critical mover. She composed a book of intimate essays and observations about observations like children imitating fish to understand "fishness" and conversations between dock workers and elderly residents of a harbor area who were both involved in creating choreography that represents their community. The book is called, "*Hiking the Horizontal: Field Notes of a Choreographer*," which says to me that she doesn't leave the artform as an obvious physicality. She critically analyzes the phenomena, transmitting its meaning in a way that makes the message of the action commonly understandable.

This explains why the title, “How to Do A Communication...” rather than “How to Communicate...” A performer does a performance and the children are doing an imitation. In this paper, I’m illustrating a way to understand communication through movement. (“How to communicate” is less appropriate than “how to do a communication,” in this context even though the former is more commonly used. The etymology from Latin “communicationem” [nominative communication] literally means “something imparted or transmitted to make common.”) Lerman recognizes the reader as one who desires down-to-earth techniques that engage learning and generates artistic collaboration. All of this starts with small, ordinary gestures that we make while talking or a quirky thing we don't know we do. Dancers like Lerman observe our doings closely and stylistically incorporate them into a composition to which they ascribe an intended message.

Performance Art examines the theatricality of human activity. All events, actions, behaviors and elements must be deliberate because they establish a construct that ostensibly elevates the everyday into significance. A frame promotes a "pretty picture" to a painting because it is framed and displayed, setting it apart from the rest of the room. A carved chunk of wood turns into an object worth consideration when it sits on a pedestal. People who pretend become actors when they play on an elevated floor. However, a "Performance Piece" bears no separation of audience and event. A palpable witnessing infuses the activated space when the performance is convincingly behaved so that all attending believe the presented reality. Audience members nearly see the performing artist working out an idea in the moment with no "Fourth Wall." The things that happen in the charged field where everyone is affected and changed simply because they *watched*. Every minute thing that occurs in the presentation, intentional or not, conveys meaning and guides the viewers’ attention. The performer must carry on with spontaneous "mistakes" and incorporate them without disruption. I’ve experienced this type of intuitive flow. My intuition wasn’t reliably flowing and guiding me, most times I had to go with the flow, chasing it and hoping the mistake would resolve well. If a mouse unintentionally scurries across my stage floor, the audience naturally includes it in the meaning of the piece. The mouse must now become a part of the story that my persona believes. Since the theatrical Fourth Wall is non-existent in this art form, viewers gain an uncanny sense of whether a performer is insincere or superficial. So, metacognition in the devising of a Performance Piece, every stylized action, clothing, prop or object, lighting, and sound must be selected thoughtfully. Perhaps the most exciting attribute of

Performance Art is that the adjoined edges of the real life and performed exist. That is a crucial consideration for all audience members and the performers who construct the event simultaneously.

### How to Be with Ones' Self While Moving

I flipped through Anne Bogart's book, *A Director Prepares, Seven Essays on Art and Theater*, most drawn to the chapters titled with a single word that leaves a great deal to suggestion. Before beginning to read, I enjoy this because each title prompts a journal reflection that I can hold up against the author's words. I glean passages that reflect my own "Memory," "Terror," "Embarrassment," and "Resistance." Bogart begins "Memory" with bodily memory using the individual expression of shapes and forms that signify the questions posed in theatrical performances. In her explanation, the individual's body memory is directly linked with the collective human memory. She begins, "We enact plays in order to remember relevant questions; we remember these questions in our bodies and the perceptions take time in real time and space." And, "The act of memory is a physical act and lies at the heart of the art of theater. If the theater were a verb, it would be 'to remember.'" These two statements help me understand my need to process questions beyond the verbal into a dimensional temporal unfolding simultaneously felt and seen. Making a learning process physical might attach new ideas to implicit or tacit knowledge more effectively for me than any other learning modality. Now, I wonder if the 'glue' that binds the new information to the implicit or tacit knowledge has a name. Improvisational dancers and choreographers use the word "initiate" or "initiation" to identify the unconscious nano-second when their bodies get the impulse to move in a particular way before they even know *why* they are doing that action or where it will lead them.

Bogart continues in her chapter called, *Terror*, "I believe that part of the answer to getting out of your own way is the acceptance of terror as primal motivation and full body listening to what develops out of it." She defines terror as a response to the chaos of life and an ingredient, along with play, for a compelling experience for audience and creator. My definition of terror is of a profound inadequacy that I won't know what to do in those nano-seconds of response to chaos. My talent and practice temporarily leave my body for the time being to the point that everything is surreal and detached. The only way to relate my experience of this type of terror is that it's like



waking up from sleep walking and find myself standing at the edge of a high dive platform. Did I intend to jump? Why would my intuitive guide lead me to terror?

### Freedom

Bogart responds, "When I am stymied and have no idea what to do or what comes next, I know it is time for me to take a leap. Because directing is intuitive, it involves walking with trembling and terror into the unknown." What, besides jumping out of her director's chair, turns over in her? Is her leap intuitive, or is it a level of proficiency that she draws from her sleeve with an unconscious awareness, having a sense of the flexibility and the limits of her craft? Peter Brook offers that, "a large part of our excessive, unnecessary manifestations come from of terror that if we are not somehow signaling all the time that we exist, we will no longer be there." These ideas bring me to wonder if performing is a way for me to prove to myself that I exist, especially in light of the apparent impact of falling into the swimming pool, the punishment, and my existence that was once dispensed.

I think about my thinking about reality; I try to be aware of the place where I live but can't always see around me. I learned that the body is where the thought of intuition and extra-sensory perception occurs. Even though I feel skeptical about intuition because it's not supported in my family or among friends, and it's too reminiscent of New Age blathering, I practice the exercises in Day's book, *Practical Intuition*. After leaving a New Age cult and feeling deterred from anything spiritual, my first question to the author is, "Are you for real?" Pun intended, does she believe what she teaches, is she even real to herself? Apparently, the dancers whom I interviewed for "*Why Writing My Thoughts Is Too Slow..*" also believe firmly that intuition always knows something that I don't know that I know. People who withhold information from friends usually have an agenda. If a part of me, or the ecstatic me beside me is withholding information, then what role do I play? Where am I in the equation?

I need to hear Day's definition of reality to determine if she's a creepy person that exacerbates my post-cult allergy to rubbish. She defines reality as, "A construct of thought that desires continuity." I accept that definition. "Actually," she says, the expectation of continuity is a glorious fic-

tion. Reality depends upon our choices of what and how we choose to observe." (I'm sure someone else said this better). Day's statement prompts me to question whether or not my intuitive experience really happened, even though her profession is to teach how to utilize intuition. She avidly contends the realness of intuition, but not how to discern between one type of mental activity and another. Was the voice of the floating woman real only to an imaginative little girl, or did the little girl actually hear an external voice, since children are generally said to be sensitive to extra sensory perception?

Apparently, one might simply tune into one's intuition by merely noticing, which feels safe like a small-scale thought experiment. In these private small-scale experiments, we can turn off our inner critic, improvise, tear things down, let distractions and time fall away. Maybe intuition gains strength and influence also. Improvisational rapper, Jason Moran, glows, "I haven't been able to find any other feeling in the world that comes close to like how my heart kind of pumps when that moment arrives." If we let go of the memorized and structured, making room for the freeform, a different brain pattern arises. Trusted improvisation fires up slower and deeper consciousness in the brain, where free associations and insights reside.

Freeform movement in any open space is my version of a mind dump into a journal. I'm releasing all that my body has experienced in a day to give it time to "gestate" in deeper levels of unconscious processing, and later to provide the physical expression a name or narrative. Repeatedly, I notice that my body articulates things that my brain typically speeds over, and the details multiply when I attune to what arises. "We label as much as we can with language in the hopes that once we have named something, we need no longer fear it." Bogart seems to address me directly, "This labeling enables us to feel safer, and it also kills the mystery in what has been labeled, removing life and danger from what has been defined." It's as if Bogart recommends intuitively leaping into terror and resisting the urge to name what occurs with words.

### Fulfillment Ahead

Fulfilling the essence of the avant-garde, Performance Art strives to blur and permeate the boundaries of art and life\ and take from numerous disciplines. One who says that Performance Art isn't useful or valid may be right if they are concerned with making a livelihood by selling

seats. Like any other art form, plenty of performances are contrived, insincere, and annoying. Sometimes the performer is clearly not immersed in the transformative state that innately feels as if one is experiencing something for the first time (sometimes performances are rehearsed other times left to chance), keeping audiences from seeing the performer's thinking and relating process. I have done performances like this. It's not always possible to slip into that gloriously fluid mind state that witnesses each and every moment as it seems to mystically play out.

In most versions of the Hansel and Gretel fairy tale, the children climb onto the back of The White Swan who takes them to the other side of a river bank where their loving father awaits. The dream symbol of the white swan often signifies self-transformation, intuition, and sensitivity. It's also a metaphor for purification. In my version of the story, The White Swan takes the children away from the anxiety of (not knowing their existence), toward their agency to reclaim themselves over and over, continuously, as a courageous motion toward autonomy and joy. The Father is the embodiment of self-forgiveness that makes everything not only okay, but a good story about real and make believe to retell at school when tranquility resumes.

Creativity and research both flow in the same cycle as Hansel and Gretel's tale. They start from nascent "hopes, concerns, imagined goals and plans." We children, storytellers, creatives, performers, therapists, dancers, anthropologists, teachers leave 'home' to try out new practices or techniques, play, experiment and create. When something begins to transform, chaos or anticipation ensues. The datum are collected, clues, breadcrumbs are recollected, and clues are analyzed. We are continuously busy with transformations from which we step back to evaluate and reflect, reflect, reflect and finally, we reimagine.

I'm asking, if Hansel and Gretel are traveling around the cycle of loss, research and creativity, what is at the center of the circle? The turning point is often hard to see, but probably easier to know it by feeling. How and in what ways can we change our position to look out at any angle we choose and make new or different meaning? I think it requires even the smallest deliberate movement, a performance, which delights in asking, "What are you doing?"

In the outset of this paper I stated that a feeling of "resolution," and inklings of future actions

would help me summarize the research and help me know when I could draw my query to a close. Now I see more questions to answer by performing an epicycle of meta-analysis of this paper.



*Exhibit #6. 'To Be So Blessed', spray paint and pastel, 15x15, by the author, 2010.*

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